

Those who support a withdrawal might wish to examine the assumptions that lie behind their suggestion. What if we withdraw and the violence actually worsens, full-scale civil war ensues, or terrorists enjoy safe-haven to plan attacks against America and our friends? Do we then face the options only of tolerating this situation in perpetuity or reinvading the country?

A few observers have argued that the United States has an option of somehow pulling our troops from Iraq but still managing things from afar. This is nonsense. The United States will have no leverage to manage things once we have left the country. The battle in Iraq, which is likely to remain counterinsurgency in character, is ill-suited to the extensive use of air power, which would be the foremost instrument available to us from outside. We could no more prevail in Iraq from outside than we could win the war in Vietnam by continuing to bomb the North. As tempting as it is to seek a solution that would let us both draw down our troops and preserve our military options in Iraq, that solution does not exist. The options on the table have been there from the beginning: withdraw and fail or commit and succeed.

Don't take my word for it. Ask those whose security is at stake every day. The Iraqi Government does not want us to set an arbitrary timeline for withdrawal. As the Iraqi Minister for National Security wrote in yesterday's Washington Post, more important than some series of dates is the achievement of set objectives for restoring security. Similarly, our friends in the neighborhood fear a precipitous American withdrawal. Allies in Europe and Asia encourage us to see this war through to its end.

Because we cannot pull out and hope for the best, because we cannot withdraw and manage things from afar, because morality and our security compel it, we have to see this mission through to completion. Drawdowns must be based on conditions in-country, not an arbitrary deadline rooted in our domestic politics.

Our domestic politics do have an effect on the war in Iraq, and again I fear that this amendment would have a deleterious effect. Anyone reading it gets the sense that the Senate's foremost objective is the drawdown of American troops. The sense they should get is that America's first goal in Iraq is to win the war—that is what they should get—and that all other policy decisions support and are subordinate to the successful completion of our mission. Like the sponsors of this legislation, I hope we bring home American troops as soon as possible. But suggesting to the American people that withdrawal is at hand, we risk once again raising unrealistic expectations that can only cost domestic support for America's role in this conflict, a war we must win.

None of this is to say that success in Iraq will be quick or easy. On the con-

trary, this war is long and it is hard and it is tough. We will see significant achievements, like the killing of Zarqawi and the completion of the Iraqi Cabinet, but we will see steps backward as well, like the continuing violence in Baghdad and the insurgency in Ramadi. No one should have any illusions about the costs of this conflict as it has been waged thus far or as it will be waged as we move ahead, but neither should anyone have illusions about the role of Iraq in the war on terror today. It has become a central battleground in our fight against those who wish us grave harm, and we cannot wish away this fundamental truth. We cannot fall prey to wishful thinking that we can put the costs and the difficulties and the frustrations aside by ignoring our challenges and responsibilities.

I urge my colleagues to vote against this amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from New York is recognized.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, if the Senator will yield for a unanimous consent request?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator ROCKEFELLER be added as a cosponsor of our amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, for the information of Senators—if I could get Senator WARNER's attention—the order on our side will be Senators CLINTON, FEINSTEIN, and SALAZAR.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, the same order with the addition of SALAZAR.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THUNE). The Senator from New York is recognized.

Mrs. CLINTON. Mr. President, I rise in support of the Levin amendment of which I am proud to be an original cosponsor. At a moment when 130,000 soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, active duty, Guard and Reserve are serving bravely in Iraq and when the debate in Congress over our Nation's Iraq policy has grown particularly divisive and heated, I believe it is time for the Members of this body to put politics aside and choose between success and the status quo.

By playing politics and blindly following the President, too many are deaf to the hue and cry about the failures of this administration in the execution of its policies. And too often, our colleagues on the other side of the aisle in both Chambers are asking politically motivated questions, not engaging in the kinds of fruitful discussion that asks the tough national security questions we need to address and answer.

I think it is time to choose whether we believe we have the right roadmap for success in Iraq. While our troops are serving bravely and with our na-

tional security in the balance, it is time to choose what is more important—a strategy to win in Iraq or a strategy for Republicans to win elections here at home.

There are no easy answers as to how we solve the problems created by this administration. There are no easy answers as to how we work to enable the Iraqis to hold their country together and to keep it from becoming a terrorist refuge and launching pad.

I simply do not believe it is a strategy or a solution for the President to continue declaring an open-ended and unconditional commitment, nor do I believe it is a solution or a strategy to set a date certain for withdrawal without regard to the consequences. Instead, I support this responsible way forward, a roadmap for success that will more quickly and effectively take advantage of Iraqi oil revenues, build up Iraqi infrastructure, foster Iraqi civil society, challenge Iraq's neighbors to do more to ensure stability in Iraq, and allow our troops to begin coming home.

We all know that our troops are in harm's way right now in a volatile region of the world for which America has significant interests at stake. We are at a profound turning point for our Nation. We are entrusted by our constituents, both those who serve and those who do not, to do what we think is right for them, for our States, and our country.

Let's be clear about what this debate is about. My friends on the other side of the aisle believe that the status quo is working in Iraq. They do not believe we need a fundamental change in policy. They choose to continue blindly following the President.

We Democrats disagree. We believe we need a new direction in Iraq that will increase the chances for success on the ground. I may disagree with those who call for a date certain for withdrawal, but I do not doubt their patriotism. I may disagree with those who believe in an unconditional commitment without end, but I do not doubt their patriotism either.

Sadly, however, there are those who do doubt the patriotism of many who raise serious questions about this war. They choose to tar all who disagree with an open-ended, unconditional commitment as unpatriotic, as waving the white flag of surrender.

They may not have a war strategy, but they do have an election strategy. This is the road they took America down in 2002. It was a dead end for our country then; it is a dead end now.

The politically motivated resolutions put forth by leading Republicans to gain tactical partisan advantage are a disgrace. In so doing, they have broken faith with those who serve and those of us who support our troops and who work for the success of this mission.

It is wrong, plain and simple, to turn this serious debate about our policies and national security into a partisan squabble designed to mislead voters.